



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## WHERE THE SIRES OF NATURE HIDE

The best place I know of to watch the pre-migratory habits of birds is an old cranberry bog encircled by thick wet woods. In the mystery of it the very spirit of the migration seems to dwell. Here is the heart of wildness, but near enough to houses for an oriole to startle in. A part of the bog literally floats, for there used to be a small lake there which people still living remember; and many other parts one can make quake and gurgle for yards around as he flounders across. It is a marsh several acres in area, upheld by roots, piled deep with sphagna mosses, and overgrown with long, shaggy grass. Every here and there the mud is exposed, and there is water enough at the surface to float the golden bladderwort; at intervals, miniature pond-holes big enough for the stocky yellow lilies to come in. Out of the slime crawl huge gray turtles that sometimes appear centuries old. In the drier portions flourish sundew and arrowhead, and pitcher plants in profusion. Through the middle flows a broad sluggish ditch which has the qualities of both growth and decay conspicuously blended in the waste surroundings; on the still surface of its backwaters duckweed mantles; while along the tiny shores of its sylvan outlet below, dapper fleeting warblers will sometimes stay to drink and bathe.

The whole swamp is a place of prodigious vitality. Things hardly cease to grow there; once in, they never die out; one finds them there year after year, generation after generation, as if for all time. The arethusas that the oldest inhabitant of the town used to hunt for in the Mays of her girlhood are still cherished and gathered by her descendants, although the flowers remember what most men have forgotten, and are scarcest where the lake was formerly. Here in this swamp climes even overlap. Dozens of plants that luxuriate on the low barrens of Cape Breton thrive also in this swamp on the southern border of Massachusetts. The creeping snowberry vine is native to it; the prettily whorled bunch-berry gleams as cheerily in certain nooks there as in the mountains; the massed grey-green and shell-pink of the northern andromeda, stiff to the touch as if

frozen, arrest the early wanderer's eye. One could fancy that the boreal growths he finds were remnants from the days of polar ice carrying out of their original habitat certain embryonic germs of the north. Here nature teems. Her fecundity is exhaustless and multiform. Everywhere there is free and lusty generation of all things. But things gross and rotting are kept from being repellent by the attractiveness of vigor or the fascination of natural corruption. About life in the swamp there is no trace of lewdness, no violation, no shame. The blend of fair and foul is striking; the dissolution, whence is the issue of all life, less covert than elsewhere; the genesis of life out of death, revealed. Beauty, both fragile and sturdy, the swamp shows to be but the outward manifestation of intense vitality. Everything shoots, when summer has fully come, with a startling rankness. There is something very potent about a fertility that will send a swamp wild rose or azalea towering into blossom through and above thicket tanglery so that a man has to look up at it. Just as beneath the shades within, there is something that the swamp alone can show about a flower, like the *habenaria*, which develops only by means of leaf-screened sunshine and then, after patiently biding its time, comes out a lovely spire of delicate flowers, exquisite in texture, fringing, and fragrance, and of a lucent pale amethyst sunset pink. What a thrill it gives to sight one stately spike after another, each solitary, a torch of steady seraph flame over the jungle of royal ferns and other greenery of the forest floor! It makes one think of what Gissing said:—

“Nature, the great Artist, makes her common flowers in the common view; no word in human language can express the marvel and loveliness of what we call the vulgarest weed, but those are fashioned under the gaze of every passer-by. The rare flower is shaped apart, in places secret, in the Artist's subtle mood; to find it is to enjoy the sense of admission to a holier precinct. Even in my gladness I am awed.”

But perhaps it is in the shadow of the woods edging the open swamp which allure one on—

“To the forest's dark heart down a dappled glade,”

that the mystery of the old swamp is most strongly felt,—a mystery anticked in strange bits of life there, an orange toadstool gleaming out from under the evergreens, the eerie, strange-world look of hawk youngsters staring down over the side of their bulk of a nest, the suggestion as of Chinese grotesque in the head streaking of some black and white warbler seen at a strange angle, or the spectre-start of unfolding poplar buds amid the universal greening around.

Spring comes to the swamp late. Down there she very, very slowly takes her place, and day by day and week by week wins her sure, if gradual, victory over winter, returning leisurely with the ripe wisdom, it would seem, born of many centuries of experience with the discouragements and rebuffs of untimely weather, to which the swamp, of all places, is most incident. To watch the manikin ground-forest grow from a sparsity in which each individual plant is distinct into a riotous maze of inseparable green things,—that is pure delight. In May the beauty of the wood effect is largely due to the hoary violet of boughs, treetops, and shadows that can be discerned far within the fretwork of tiny new leaves. Even later, on still days of rainy springs, one can yet see the whole forest in the pools collected at the roots of the trees. When the foliage is at full tide, the effect of density in the woods is in part due to the lower leaves on the undergrowth which later thin out. To realize the extent of the growth of late spring and summer one has only to mark how completely hidden in July and August growing things are which, two months before, were conspicuous. Spring's charm in unfolding leaf and peeping flower is as strong in the swamp, her freshness and daintiness all the more striking for juxtaposition with so much that is still winter—dead or inertly alive. This glint of vivid new life over bog and bough heightens the effect of the secularly old that changes not with the generations and which at this open season of the year the eye can sense and peer into as it cannot in summer. I do not know whether the brooding imagination delights more to fill out with the leaves and flowers and growth to come the free spaces than that surprise an eye accustomed to midsummer's imperviousness of foliage; or to penetrate the wilderness of obscura-

tion later to the mystery which it contains; or in autumn to gaze through the serried trunks in unending rank and file to the purples and greys of bare branches showing above a thinning remnant of brilliant color below, and to think of all the growth and hidings of the year behind. At any rate, spring in the swamp is uncharacteristically rich in reminiscence and comes as redolent of memories as autumn. One is always being reminded of other seasons. The water in its forest pools is often dark wine-color,—the color under the sounding-board of Jack's pulpit,—as if stained with the scarlet and crimson leaves of autumn. There is a faint replica and blend of the high color of autumn and the sombre hues of winter in the diaphanous ruddiness, burnt orange, and mauve that the tender shoots of spring take on in their developing.

And spring, having once come, lingers longest there. If one is late in arriving, the swamp will be his place of hope for finding some fern still unfurling and the latest flower of its kind. There he can find "the flowers withering in sheltered places of which Dionysus knew"; now they are azalea, now blackberry blossoms, now rose pogonia. Spring flowers fade most slowly there: cowslips,—golden splashes of them like sunshine distilled into flower at the roots of the forest,—and violets sometimes wait for the moccasin flowers and even later ones; and orchids which, when finally developed, seem to wait longest for the ministration of their propagating insects, appear almost undying. Perhaps it is less that the flowers last so much longer there, than that they show more individuality about their time of blooming—some early, some late. In the swamp, too, one is sure to come upon stray rarities, sooner or later,—the golden-winged warbler, the long-looked-for orchid, the frontier colony of climbing fern. Whoever can really know all that there actually is in the swamp? Search as carefully as he may and feel as sure as he can that he has discovered everything, surprises are still in store for him. This inexhaustibleness is one of its fascinations. The unexpectedness of nature-troves is always an element in their charm. Here belated migrant warblers comrade each other in little flocks even into the summer, and forget in congenial fellowship the instinct that set them wandering and the ways of

all their kind in the spring. Here the most northern stragglers of southern birds, like the chat, or the most southern lingerers of northern birds, like the Canadian warbler, may chance to nest. Summer is here late in reaching its prime and no one knows when it lapses into autumn. The shiny gold-thread leaf that embroiders the ground of the inner swamp woods simply grows deeper and deeper green as the season advances.

The most typical flowers of the swamp are pink lady's-slippers and bladderwort, sundew and pitcher-plants, and the rarer orchids. Perhaps the arethusa for its varied suggestiveness, and the azalea for other characteristics, are peculiarly the flowers of the swamp. Both, like the dainty white violet, have the wild pungent fragrance that most belongs to it. The strange, grotesque, fascinating beauty of the rose purple arethusas start the imagination, like the swamp itself, now in one direction, now in another: in fading and drooping to the fall I have seen some of the sun-weary ones that took all the postures of pointed pinions, then in the fresh pert flowers, devilish archness and horns, in a crooked, leaning one, a satyrish leer; in profile, the ears all alert, and thrust-out tongue, of some rogue; an opening bud, like the fingers of an arched hand slowly drawing apart with only a crevice showing. But the azalea's heavy odor, with its tang of the acrid earth, is the fragrance of the swamp, far more than that of the partridge-berry blossom with which the earth within the woods is at the same time in many places all snuggle-starred,—that fragrance of arbutus and new-mown hay combined, the pure breath of full summer in the open. And the drip of withered azalea blossom puts one in mind of the unnoisome decay always going on in the swamp, an essential element in its unifying blend of backward and forward, strays and loiterers,—life, half-life, and death.

At the edge the woods are open, cut into with inroads and channels of the wetter swamp. The trees there are for the most part maples, which in autumn first and most gorgeously respond "to the wandering frostfire along the highways of leaf, that mysterious breath whose touch is silent flame"; and tamaracks, especially loved at that time in spring when they are all studded with tufts of fresh tender needles by roving

bands of goldfinches rollicking in song. These trees recede from the inlets of swamp which interrupt the border with picturesque 'intacks' up into the deeper woods less grassy and mossier the deeper they go. The tufted loosestrife there decks with gold globes of minute flower the salvage of lush, taller greenery wherever some subsidence of water allows it to come in. The cup-shaped, moss-bottomed hollows hidden there between the denser thickets,—

"Where little things with beating hearts,  
Hold shining eyes between the leaves,"

are steeped in sunshine. Fringed orchids light with their torches of snow-white flower the dim arcades beyond, and the parula warbler sometimes nests in the pendent bunches of usnea moss overhead. Winter lingers longest in this border, which is all flooded and brown long after the look of summer has come into the rest of the woods. The growing supremacy of summer in the 'boscage', as I call this swampy fringe of the great woods, is marked by the increasing profusion of the lovely small marsh ferns that push up all over the root crests and spongy promontories of moss until the ground along the margin of the woods is all a-wave and a-crinkle and a-spray with them, pulsing crisp and cool to the eye. This plummy maze of fern is synonymous with summer there, for it is quickly laid low by driving rains and quickest to brown under influence of drought or frost. The marsh fern's tissue is peculiarly sensitive to the light. Like dandelions, these ferns take their expression from the day. What more beautifully visualizes infinity than one of these ferny vistas, dappled with the sunlight that flakes through the strata of boughs, frond after frond in endless succession, each frondlet edged with innumerable needle points all shimmering off under the woodland's intermittent glamor of light? As September comes into its own,—or earlier, forward seasons,—the characteristic view in the boscage is down one of these fern-glades, upon some droop of autumn-fired foliage burning against the shadows within, or upon a graceful sapling hung with those lovely scarlet berries of the mountain holly then all bloomed over with a bluish purple darkling them strangely in harmony

with the forest glooms. The gem color of the swamp is dark rich red like these, or that of the baneberries deep in the green, or the pure deep blue of Clintonia berries, fern-scented, and turning during July from green through the white of porcelain to rich Prussian blue.

Deeper within, crowns of the dark green deep wood fern-Dryopteris spinulosa billow, tip to tip; in serried ranges, seemingly for miles under those shadowy canopies of leaf. The goldsmith sunbeams, that will pierce even these deeper shades, chase the leaf sprays upon which they happen to fall with fine tracing of highest light. The *chiaroscuro* of the woods, its lovely arabesque of sunlight and shadow, is varied with every kind of leaf, according to its shape and texture, and different again hourly according to the position of each individual leaf in relation to the sun. And breeze makes the effects myriad. The beauty of the forested swamp is for the most part in masses and contrast of color rather than in form; generally the foliage is so dense as to admit of appreciation of beauty of form only in details. Down through those caverns of foliage the wind, turbulent in the tree-tops, comes only with its rush and revel muffled, with the softened roar of distant surf. Dense as they are though, the woods are not so much dark as shadowy, except under the pines where the moccasin flowers grow, or in the midst of the closest stands of cedar. To realize how light the woods normally are, one has only to see them in the gloaming when they stand dim against a glowing sunset sky, or to heed half-warily, through the momentarily darkening aisles of elfin green gloom, the light in some vast eye of crimson off to the northwest solemnly withdrawing. Such hours in the twilight, which folds the woods' mystery, or in the dawning, which enlarges it, when some morn one happens upon the woods so spiritually pure after rain as to make the heart beat faster and wake the soul to see, are the hours of highest poetry in the woods. The weird chiming of the veery, wild, deep, aspiring,—that sweet rough song of the woods mating earth and sky,—is the very voice of such hours. Ordinarily, the stillness of basking sunshine and musing shadow prevails. The vivid green shadow-mottled *algæ* filming through the glassy pools there are motionless through all storms and



changes of weather outside. Only the stir of the life of insect or water at their bottom moves them. Ravages of fire and wind by which these woods have been stricken are as submerged in the prevalent beauty of peace and calm there as are the scars of tempest in that of the hills above. Finding a sparrow's nest confidently placed beside a tussock of grass not an inch above the gathering of rain unprecedentedly flooding the swamp some wet spring, or thinking of even tinier sitters braving the rude buffets and deluge of terrific thunder-storms, impresses one with the imperturbability of all life in nature.

Notwithstanding that all this life is an intense individualism centering about the male and female to the perpetuation of their kind,—a riot of growth, development, generation, with no consideration for the next alongside, still it is all mysteriously combined into a harmony in which our senses find delight, our souls rest and inspiration. About all the struggle in nature there seems to be no enmity. Lives in nature, all indifferent to each, each set on its own advancement alone, are individually irresponsive to us, but collectively tonic, comradely, spiritually uplifting.

In "the tense germinating silence of green things" everywhere surrounding one, he realizes that the swamp is a place so instinct with the quiet insistence of life as to be practically timeless. A sense of the eternal is an element in every deep experience with nature. It is hard to realize that it ever has been or ever will be different from what it is now. While in its presence it is almost impossible to recall its very different aspect even at a season's remove. Beside the laws perdurably working there, human affairs,—war, business, passion,—seem insignificant and ephemeral indeed.

"Down in yon watery nook  
Where bearded mists divide  
The grey old gods whom chaos knew,  
The sires of nature hide."

LOUIS BLISS GILLET.

New York